

# *De Land da We:*

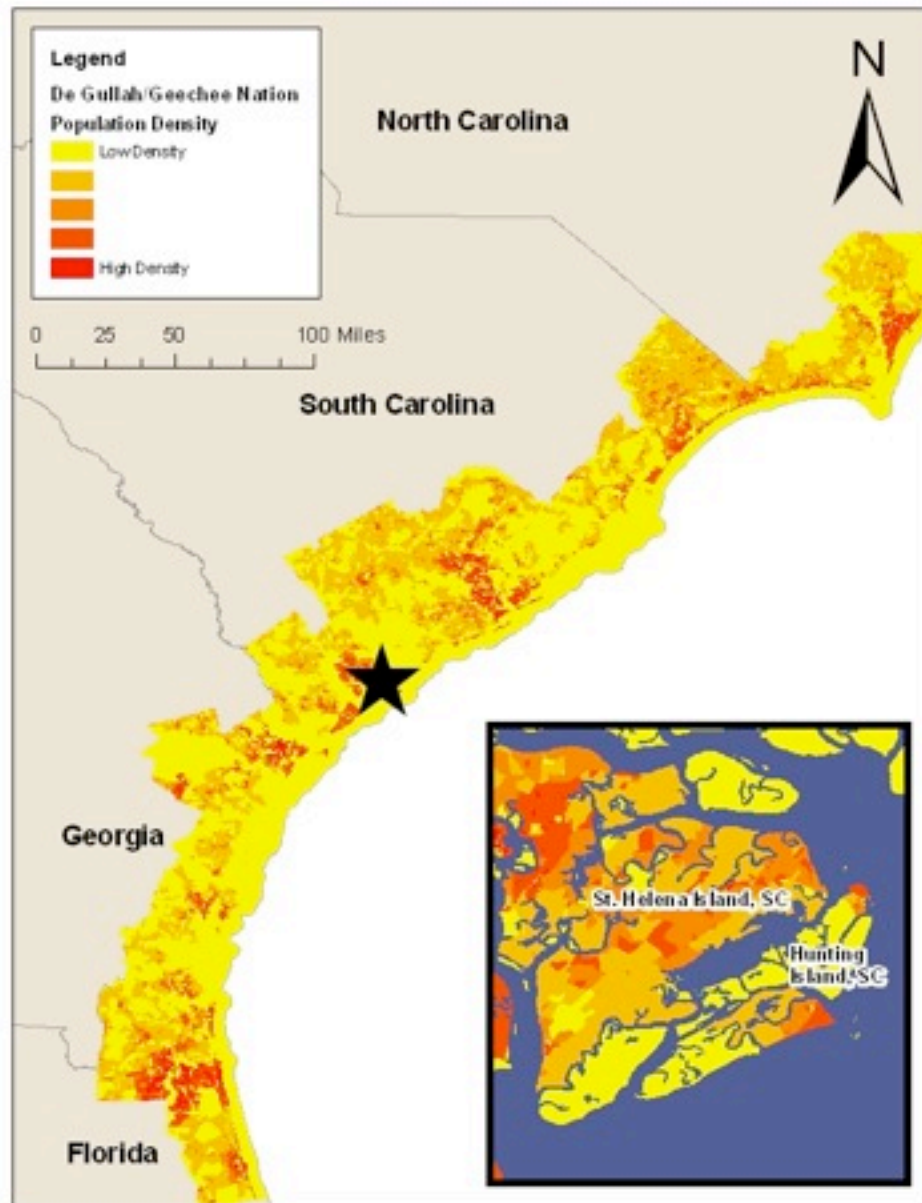
## *Gullah/Geechee Sustainability*



St. Helena and Hunting Islands, SC, Gullah/Geechee Nation  
January 28, 2012



# De Gullah/Geechee Nation



[www.officialgullahgeechee.info](http://www.officialgullahgeechee.info)

Compiled and Submitted by Queen Quet

## Overview



**“De Island da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability”** workshop sponsored by [\*The Coastal Society\*](#) and [\*Taylor & Francis\*](#) was held in order to provide an opportunity for people in the [\*Gullah/Geechee Nation\*](#) to engage with and become more familiar with the activities of [\*The Coastal Society\*](#) and [\*Taylor & Francis\*](#) in an effort to raise awareness of additional partners and resources to assist with the sustainability of the quality of life on the Sea Islands throughout the [\*Gullah/Geechee Nation\*](#). The workshop roundtable provided valuable input to the Gullah/Geechee coastal sustainability plan that the [\*Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition\*](#) has been working on through efforts with other partners including the [\*Environmental Defense Fund\*](#), [\*South Carolina Coastal Conservation League\*](#), [\*Hunting Island Nature Center\*](#) and the [\*College of Charleston Riley Center for Livable Communities\*](#) which all contributed to the success of the event. The [\*Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition\*](#) and the [\*Gullah/Geechee Angel Network\*](#) hosted the interactive workshop.

**“De Island da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability”** began with an overview of the workshop and the educational and community leadership partners that were in attendance. This group proceeded out onto the islands as a united circle after spending the first hour sharing their work in the coastal region and how their efforts were actually concentric circles that have now intersected in this work with and within the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#).

The living circle of those in attendance was united over a Gullah/Geechee traditional libation and prayer before proceeding on a tour of St. Helena Island led by [Queen Quet](#), Chieftess of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) and Founder, of the [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#). Throughout the day participants actively engaged in dialogue regarding the myriad of definitions that have been used to describe “sustainability” and the benefit and conflicts that have been attached to the use of this word and to issues pertaining to cultural continuation and environmental protection.



The day concluded with a plan of action roundtable/circle in which all the participants discussed what they had experienced throughout the day and how each would define “sustainability.” The outcome of the notes that were captured from the statements made will be used by the [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#) and the [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#) in conjunction with leaders of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) to find resources to assist the community with terminology and methodology that can assist with legislative changes that may be beneficial for better fisheries and coastal management in this region given the numerous challenges for the future which include, but are not limited to, building on waterways and climate change.



# De Land da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability “Think Tank”

**Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation and Founder of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition**

Queen Quet Marquette L. Goodwine is a published author, computer scientist, lecturer, mathematician, historian, columnist, preservationist, film consultant, and "The Art-ivist." She is the founder of the premiere advocacy organization for the continuation of Gullah/Geechee culture, the [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#). Queen Quet has not only provided “historical presentations” throughout the world, but was also the first Gullah/Geechee person to speak on behalf of her people before the *United Nations* in Geneva, Switzerland.



Queen Quet was one of the first of seven inductees to the *Gullah/Geechee Nation Hall of Fame*. She received the "Anointed Spirit Award" for her leadership and for being a visionary. In 2008, she was recorded at *UNESCO* Headquarters in Paris, France at a United Nations Conference in order to have the human rights story of the Gullah/Geechee people archived for the United Nations. In 2009, she was invited by the *Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations* to come and present before the newly founded “Minority Forum” as a representative of the Gullah/Geechee Nation and the *International Human Rights Association for American Minorities (IHRAAM)* which is an NGO in consultative status with the United Nations. Queen Quet is a directorate member for *IHRAAM* and for the *International Commission on Human Rights*. She represented these bodies and the Gullah/Geechee Nation at the “United Nations Forum on Minority Rights.”

Currently, Queen Quet serves on numerous boards locally and nationally. She is vetted with the White House as an *US Department of Interior* Expert Commissioner and the General Management Plan chair of the *Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Commission*. She is consistently in partnership with organizations focused on the natural environment and insuring that that grassroots knowledge of indigenous peoples is incorporated in policy processes associated with legislation and planning. She has worked with the *US Department of State* in educating people on the “dynamism and diversity” of cultures within the United States.

Queen Quet has won countless awards for being a woman of distinction, for her scholarship, writings, artistic presentation, activism, cultural continuation and environmental preservation. Her accolades include the *United States Jefferson Award* for community service, the *Jean*

*Laney Folk Heritage Award* for Gullah Advocacy from the state of South Carolina, the inaugural *HOTEP Award*, the inaugural *MaVynee Betsch Conservation Award*, numerous Woman of Distinction Awards, the *National Black Herstory Award*, and several Queen Quet Day and “Gullah/Geechee Days” proclamations in various states. She received the “*Preserving Our Places in History Lifetime Achievement Award*” from the *South Carolina African American Heritage Commission*. The *General Assembly of South Carolina* also honored Queen Quet with *Resolution 1453* for the work that she has done on behalf of her home state and Gullah/Geechee people locally, nationally, and internationally.

She was selected, elected, and enstooled by her people to be the first Queen Mother, “head pun de bodee,” and official spokesperson for the Gullah/Geechee Nation. As a result, she is respectfully referred to as “Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation and Head-of-State.”

**Elder Carlie Towne, Minister of Information for the Gullah/Geechee Nation and Founder of the [\*Gullah/Geechee Angel Network\*](#)**



Elder Carlie was born and raised in Union Heights, a Gullah/Geechee neighborhood in the Neck Area between the City of Charleston, South Carolina, and North Charleston, South Carolina, to parents who also are from Union Heights. Elder Carlie Towne is a producer, playwright, poet, TV host, and a narrator.

She is the founder of *Carlie Towne Production Company*, which produces TV shows, plays and commercials. The production company also provides funds for the *Gullah/Geechee Angel Network* which is a not-for-profit organization.

Elder Carlie Towne is the Director of *The Gullah/Geechee Angel Network* and presently serves as Minister of Information of Gullah/Geechee Nation under the leadership of Queen Quet Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation. She is an Elder in the Wisdom Circle Council of Elders for the Gullah/Geechee Nation. She was honored with the *Anointed Spirit Award* by the Gullah/Geechee Nation. She has traveled to Genev , Switzerland to the *United Nations* to represent Gullah/Geechee people.

Elder Carlie Towne says: *“I want a win win situation, when I meet with people. I try to become them, so I can empathize with them. This helps me to relate to them and they become my family so no matter what, we stay focused on the issue at hand.”*

*Our richness is in our Gullah/Geechee culture, our untapped resources and our youth. We must connect them to the Gullah/Geechee Nation so the youth, elders, families and friends can continue to connect to build our infrastructure for a win win situation.”*

The *International Gullah/Geechee Camp Meeting Center* is Elder Carlie Towne’s current project with *Architects for Humanity* which did the design pro bono. This is the vision that God has given her as she continues her journey to write, create, build, connect and inspire.

**Glenda Simmons-Jenkins, Representative of the Gullah/Geechee Nation & Co-Founder of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Committee of NE FL**

Glenda Simmons-Jenkins was born in Fernandina Beach, Florida on Amelia Island. As a native Gullah/Geechee, she plays an active role in raising awareness and understanding about her culture. She serves on the *Gullah/Geechee Nation Assembly of Representatives*, acting on behalf of her people living in the northeast Florida region of the Gullah/Geechee Nation. In 2003, she co-founded the *Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Committee of Northeast Florida*, a group of native Gullah/Geechee people who work in the local community to share the culture's history and reinvigorate its traditions. She is the granddaughter of the late Rev. Lenworth Samuel Morrison Sr., who served as a pastor of the Gullah/Geechee congregation of *First African Baptist Church*, one of the historic sites within the *Cumberland Island National Seashore*.



Representative Simmons-Jenkins earned her bachelor's degree in Journalism and Communications from the *University of Florida* in Gainesville. After attending the *Howard University Press Book Publishing Institute*, she began her communications career at the *Brookings Institution*, a Washington, DC-based think tank. At *Brookings*, she worked in the publications department, marketing division. Simmons-Jenkins formerly worked for *Community Newspapers Inc.* as a staff reporter for the biweekly *News-Leader*, Florida's oldest weekly newspaper, published in her hometown. The *Florida Press Association* recognized the *News-Leader* with nine awards for her reporting.

In 2006, the *U.S. Secretary of the Interior* appointed Representative Simmons-Jenkins to serve as a Commissioner on the *Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission* where she chaired the Marketing Working Group until her term ended in 2009. She currently works as an independent communications specialist conducting publicity and promotion for non-profit community organizations. She lives with her family in O'Neil, an old community settlement six miles west of Amelia Island, FL.

**Rev. Zack Lyde, Representative of the Gullah/Geechee Nation**



Representative Zack Lyde is a native of Brunswick, GA where he has fought for environmental protection for over 40 years. Reverend Lyde is a proud representative for Gullah/Geechee human rights and environmental justice on the coast of the Georgia Golden Isles. He is an active member of the *Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association*. He is the founder of the annual "*Tunis Campbell Celebration*" which is a celebration and summit on education and rights which brings to light many of the historical contributions made by Gullah/Geechees that must be recognized and sustained.

**Ricky Wright, Vice President and Founding Member of the [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#)**



Ricky Wright is a native of St. Helena Island, SC who has continued the construction, traditional fishing, and traditional hunting methods of his Gullah/Geechee elders and ancestors. Wright has spent the last several years working on accomplishing the mission of the [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#) which he is a founding member and vice president of. Wright has presented the Gullah/Geechee traditional knowledge of fishing and shrimping and the current issues that have threatened the continuation of this aspect of his culture at educational panels for the "[Gullah/Geechee Nation International Music & Movement Festival™](#)" in Florida and Louisiana. He has also lobbied in Washington, DC in order to insure their existence of Gullah/Geechee fisheries in the future.

**Audrey Peterman, President of [Earthwise Productions](#) and Member of the [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#)**

Audrey Peterman was born on the island of Jamaica. Her roots led her to grow into a person with a passion and an undying respect for the great outdoors. With Divine Inspiration from her passion, Audrey coupled with Frank Peterman and in 1994 they founded, *Earthwise Productions*. This consulting and publishing company has provided services to *The Audubon Society*, *The Environmental Protection Agency*, *The National Park Service*, *The South Florida Water Management District*, *The Environmental Defense Fund* and numerous other agencies and organizations. [Earthwise Productions, Inc.](#) tailors strategic approaches that assist government agencies, nonprofits and corporations to engage a wider, more diverse section of the population in the enjoyment and stewardship of our publicly owned lands. Peterman has worked as a partner with the Gullah/Geechee Nation in conjunction with the *Environmental Defense Fund* for which she is a consultant. Currently, Peterman serves on a number of boards including that of the *National Parks Conservation Association* and the *National Parks Relevancy Committee* in order to further the work of her company and the involvement of people of color in planning and policy for the great outdoors. A chronology of her journey has been eloquently captured in the book that she co-authored with Frank Peterman entitled, "[Legacy on the Land.](#)"





**Frank Peterman, President of [Earthwise Productions](#) and Member of the [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#)**

Frank Peterman is a native of Florida. In 1994 co-founded, [Earthwise Productions](#) with



Audrey Peterman which has recently published the chronicle of their journeys entitled, [“Legacy on the Land.”](#) Peterman retired from being the Director of Political and Public Awareness for *The Wilderness Society*, Southeast Region in order to live his life’s dream aboard his sail boat, “The Limitless.” Peterman serves on the Board of Visitors of the *Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke University*; *Sustainable Atlanta* and *Earth Share* of Georgia. He is one half of what has been honored as the “Power Couple of Atlanta.” Peterman

has continued to use his power and influence to insure the balance between humans and nature.

**Rick DeVoe, Board Member of [The Coastal Society](#) and Executive Director of [SC Sea Grant Consortium](#)**

Rick DeVoe joined the [S.C. Sea Grant Consortium](#) in 1980, and has served as its Executive Director since 1997. Rick is also a Research Associate of the *Belle W. Baruch Institute for Marine Biology and Coastal Research at the University of South Carolina*, and Associate Faculty Member of the Graduate Program in Marine Biology and Adjunct Faculty Member with the *Marine Environmental Studies Graduate Program at the College of Charleston*. In addition to managing *Sea Grant* efforts in South Carolina, Rick's professional interests focus on coastal and marine resource policy, science-to-management linkages, science communication and education, and state and regional coastal ocean planning and policy, the latter three being areas that he feels are ripe for attention by *The Coastal Society*.

Rick previously served as President of the *Sea Grant Association (SGA)*, and currently chairs its External Relations Committee. At the national level, Rick is a member of the Executive Committee of the Board on Oceans and Atmosphere of the *National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges*, the *Federal-State Task Team of the National Science and Technology Council's Subcommittee on Integrated*

*Management of Ocean Resources (SIMOR)*, and the External Linkages Advisory Committee of the Oceans and Human Health Center at *NOAA Hollings Marine Laboratory (Charleston, SC)*. He also chairs the Board of Directors, *SouthEast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA)* and is a member of the Board of Advisors for the *Southeast Center for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence (COSEE-Southeast)*. Rick has had the pleasure of serving in the past as President of the U.S. Chapter of the *World Aquaculture Association* (now the *U.S. Aquaculture Society*) and the *National Shellfisheries Association*.

Rick has been a member of *The Coastal Society* since 1986, and served as an invited panelist in the Regional Ocean Governance session at *The Coastal Society Conference* in St. Petersburg, FL last year. He is co-editor of two books, and has authored seven book chapters and six peer-reviewed publications. Rick earned degrees from *Fairleigh Dickinson University* (marine biology), *CUNY/City College of New York* (biological oceanography), and the *University of Rhode Island* (marine policy). (On left in photo below.)



**Mitchell Helms, Interpretive Ranger and Director at [Hunting Island Nature Center](#)**

Mitchell Helms was born and raised on Johns Island, SC. He currently serves as the Public Information Coordinator and Interpretive Ranger at the [Hunting Island Nature Center](#) which was the class location for “**De Island da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Workshop.**” Helms is a graduate of the University of South Carolina with a B.A. in political science and journalism and an M.A. in education. He is a certified Lowcountry Master Naturalist and has more than 12 years of experience in science and nature education. Helms has worked with the [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#) and the [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#) on numerous innovative and interactive interpretations sessions for the past year. (On right in photo above.)

**Lesa Wineglass-Small, Board Member of The [Gullah/Geechee Angel Network](#) and Elder Emeritus of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, Owner of *Wineglass-Gullah/Geechee Productions***

**Lesa Cherise Wineglass-Small** was born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina. This Gullah/Geechee ooman attended *Simonton Elementary* and *Burke High School* before a brief stint in the *United States Air Force*. After leaving this short military career



behind, she married Elliott Haynes Small, III and one child, Brandi Jacquemaine Small, was born to this union. Lesa enrolled in *Trident Technical College*, where she studied filmmaking and TV broadcasting courses – which led to a ten year career as a news photojournalist and live truck operator for both *CBS* and *NBC* affiliates. She then went on to work on independent projects and continues to do so.

**Hollis France, *College of Charleston Political Science Department***

Hollis France joined the Political Science Department of the *College of Charleston* in 2000. She teaches courses primarily in the fields of International and Comparative Politics, including International Political Economy, Politics of Globalization, Globalization from a Community Perspective, Comparative Gender Politics, and World Politics. She also regularly offers the introductory course in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and has taught in the *FYE Program*.

Dr France earned her MA, MPhil, and PhD from the Graduate Center at the *City University of New York (CUNY)*, and her undergraduate degree from *Jersey City State College*. At the *College of Charleston* she is an active member of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies



program, the Women and Gender Studies Program and the Faculty and Staff Annual Labor Day Celebration Committee.

Dr. France's current research focuses on the intersections of neoliberal trade policies and food security in the Caribbean. She recently co-authored a pedagogical piece "Cuba Study Abroad: A Pedagogical Tool for Reconstructing American National Identity with a political science alumni (forthcoming). Her earlier publications focus on structural adjustment decision-making in Guyana, and the influence of the private sector during periods of economic reform.

**Annette Watson, *College of Charleston Political Science Department***

Annette Watson joined the *College of Charleston's* Department of Political Science in 2008, serving undergraduates majoring in political science as well as geography undergraduate minors and graduate students in the Masters of Environmental Studies Program. She offers courses on Environmental Geography, World Regional Geography, political ecology, Indigenous/Native American studies, and the politics of science.

Dr. Watson earned her undergraduate degree in Human Ecology from *College of the Atlantic*, her master's degree on the circumpolar north from the *University of Alaska-Fairbanks*, and her Ph.D. in Geography from the *University of Minnesota*. Her current research focuses on subsistence economies of North America. In Alaska, she has worked with a variety of hunters and fishermen and tribal groups on the politics of natural resource management, and in the Lowcountry she is researching similar subsistence regimes relied upon by the historic residents of the Carolinas. Her most recent published work, co-authored with a Koyukon Athabascan intellectual, articulates indigenous methods of adaptation for wildlife policy in the face of rapid climate change. Articles have appeared in *Social and Cultural Geography*, the *Journal of Environmental Management*, *Emotion Space and Society*, and *Wicazo Sa Review*. She is also currently at work on articles about the philosophy and ethics of methods in wildlife management, and a study on salmon fisheries conflict in the Yukon River Drainage. (On the right in photo below.)





**Melissa Hargrove, *University of North Florida Anthropology Department***

Dr. Melissa Hargrove is a cultural anthropologist with interest in The African Diaspora; Political Economy; Urban Anthropology; Ethnographic Method & Theory [Collaborative Anthropology]; and Race and Social Theory. She has been a member of the *Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition* and a partner of the Gullah/Geechee Nation for more than 10 years. She was the first to teach a course on Gullah/Geechee culture at the *University of Tennessee* and has created a “Transformational Learning Opportunity” course in conjunction with leaders of the Gullah/Geechee Nation for students at the *University of North Florida* to engage with a living cultural community as an aspect of their studies of anthropology. Dr. Hargrove is developing *Reinventing the Plantation: The Postcolonial Predicament of Gated Community Development in the Gullah/Geechee Nation* which was her dissertation. It is now under revision for publication in the New World Diaspora Series by the *University Press of Florida*. Her department and students of *UNF* hosted the *Gullah/Geechee Gwine Bak Conference* at their university in 2011 and will again host this event in 2013 as part of their on-going educational collaboration with the Gullah/Geechee Nation. (On left in photo above.)

**Dr. Dionne Hoskins, Program Manager of the NOAA Living Marine Resources Cooperative Science Center at Savannah State University**

Dr. Dionne Hoskins received her B.S. degree in Marine Biology from *Savannah State College* in 1992 and her doctorate in Marine Sciences from the *University of South Carolina* in 1999. She worked briefly as a postdoctoral fellow in the newly established *Marine, Environmental Science, and Biotechnology Research Center* at *SSU* in 1999 but was tasked in 2000 by the *Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC)* of *NOAA Fisheries* to develop a *Cooperative Marine Education and Research (CMER)* program at the university, the first of its kind at a historically Black university. Since then, Hoskins has worked as a Fishery Biologist through the *Galveston Laboratory* of *NOAA Fisheries* and as an Associate Graduate Professor in the Marine Science program at *SSU*. Hoskins is based in Savannah and works with undergraduate and graduate students on a variety of ecological research topics. As a benthic ecologist, her research interests revolve around the ecology of deposit feeding organisms in marine sediments. However, recent projects have examined the recovery of a transplanted marsh, the effects of fishing and disease on blue crab populations, and seasonal fluctuations of macrofaunal and microbial communities in shallow sediments. Her current graduate student is studying sea turtle populations in the U. S. Virgin Islands. Dr. Hoskins also hosts high school students in her lab, one of whom is working on socioeconomic project trying to document the historical role of African-Americans in the coastal economy of Georgia. She teaches graduate courses in benthic ecology and advanced environmetrics. She also is program manager of the *SSU* component of the *NOAA Living Marine Resources Cooperative Science Center*. (Far left in image below.)



# De Gullah/Geechee and Sustainability

## **The Gullah/Geechee Nation: A Culture Inextricably Tied to the Land & Sea**

The [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) exists from Jacksonville, NC to Jacksonville, FL. The unique creole tradition which is a blend of African and Indigenous American cultures evolved on the Sea Islands and in the mainland areas called the “Lowcountry” of North America during the period of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade. The African ethnic groups that were enslaved on the Sea Islands amalgamated their languages, spiritual practices, foodways, music, and other aspects of their cultural customs and this combination was further infused when the Africans and the Indigenous Americans became allies against enslavement and in some cases intermarried. The evolution of this combination of became the “Gullah/Geechee culture.”

On July 2, 2000 the Gullah/Geechee people came together on Sullivan’s Island in Charleston County, SC in order to culminate a one year long election of their first official head-of-state and spokesperson, Marquetta L. Goodwine. Upon the completion of the traditional African ceremony of enstooling Marquetta L. Goodwine, she not only became officially named as “[Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation,](#)” the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) also came into existence before thousands of national and international witnesses and media. This clear stand on and for the human right to self-determination of the Gullah/Geechees has continued to be respected by those beyond the borders of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#).

In accordance with the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) Constitution, the premiere organization on the protection and continuation of Gullah/Geechee culture and the human and land rights of Gullah/Geechee people, the [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#) has continued to work with partners at the local, federal, and international levels to insure that policy makers are aware of the existence of this unique cultural group and its need to live from the land and waters on which it has evolved and sustains itself. The [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#), which is a grassroots organization with international supporters, works in consistent collaboration with the official non-profit of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#), the [Gullah/Geechee Angel Network](#) to carry out the mission of the Nation which was established by the *Wisdom Circle Council of Elders* who initiated and

oversaw the election of Queen Quet and who serve as a traditional circle of advisors to the first queen mother and head-of-state for all Gullah/Geechees. The mission of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) presented in the **Gullah/Geechee Nation Declaration** is:

**“To preserve, protect, and promote our history, culture, language, and homeland and to institute and demand official recognition of the governance (minority) rights necessary to accomplish our mission to take care of our community through collective efforts which will provide a healthy environment, care for the well beings of each person, and economic empowerment.”**

**“De Land da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability”** workshop is yet another activity that helps to further the achievement of the overall mission of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) and to insure that the Gullah/Geechee people will have a plan for future generations to be able to continue their traditional practices on the land and in the waterways surrounding their homeland. Sustainability requires that something is able to be continued over time and the continuation of Gullah/Geechee traditional sustainability has been challenged by legislation that has come to the area along with many building patterns and recreational activities that have caused environmental imbalances and cultural displacement. The plan of the leaders of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) is to put together a sustainability plan that refocuses various discussions of sustainability and insures the inclusion of their traditional indigenous knowledge of balance in these discussions. Gullah/Geechees realize that without balance, nothing is generally sustainable nor sustained.

### **Defining Sustainability**

**“De Land da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability”** participants gathered on Hunting Island, SC in the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) for an interactive day long workshop examining the practices of Gullah/Geechees and the challenges to these practices for the future. Queen Quet, Chieftess of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) and Founder of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) acted as the host for the day during the circle of connection for the “think tank” and she asked for the discussion to begin with the term “sustainable” and how people in the various fields and cultures viewed this word in order for everyone to “get in the same boat” before taking their journey around the island. The group responded that it has seen this term co-opted to be utilized as a tool of privileged discourse. In fact, it has been commodified in different fields. So, in order to find an intersection between popular debate and relevance to indigenous people, the “think tank” participants agreed that the following definition aligns with their views of “sustainability:”



**sustainable** |sə'stānəbəl|

*adjective*

**1** *able to be maintained at a certain rate or level; conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources*

**2** *able to be upheld or defended*

They also agreed that although this word is often used in different arenas, the definition is not often clear or the outcomes of the policies and actions of said arenas do not meet with the above definition. To that end, Frank Peterman of *Earthwise Productions* brought forth the definition put forth in *Our Common Future* which is also called the "*The Brundtland Report*." This definition is the one that he and Audrey Peterman used in environmental arenas when varying definitions were brought forth in regard to the involvement of diverse groups in policy making and environmental justice. The *World Commission on Economic Development* brought the idea of sustainability to the global stage in 1987. The *United Nations* sponsored this study of the relationship between economic development and the environment, published as *Our Common Future*, also known as "*The Brundtland Report*." The outcome of the study was a simple definition which matches that of the Gullah/Geechee cosmology:

**Sustainability is "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."**

The [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) came into existence to insure that the culture would exist in the future. The Gullah/Geechees are a linguistic and ethnic minority which stood on its international human right to self-determination. The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities](#) which has been in existence for 20 years as of 2012 clearly states in *Article 1*:

**"1. States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.**

**2. States shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends."**

The [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#) and leaders of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) worked with the "state" of the United States to have their culture recognized and protected by the federal government. In 2006, their nine years of efforts culminated in Gullah/Geechees being recognized as a national minority with the passing of the United States Congressional "*Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act*." Therefore, Gullah/Geechee leadership sees an obligation for all levels of government effecting the coastlines of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida to work directly with them to initiate traditional subsistence laws that will thereby meet the needs of the present generation of Gullah/Geechees without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs. Currently, the legislation that exist is for commercial fishing practices and recreational fishing practices without any to allow for traditional subsistence fishing.

This has caused numerous elder Gullah/Geechees to stop the practices that literally feed their families from the waterways because the laws cause them to be penalized for carrying out their practices. In addition taxation, licensing, and other legislation has encroached upon this generations' ability to farm and continue herbal healing practices and also limits some ability to build according to traditional land use patterns in numerous areas of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#). So, in no way have the local, state, and federal policy makers been operating within the declaration as it relates to their engagement with the Gullah/Geechee national linguistic and ethnic minority.

The commission that produced "Our Common Future" (aka *The Brundtland Report*) also stated:

*"This commission believes that people can build a future that is more prosperous, more just, and more secure. Our report is not a prediction of ever increasing environmental decay, poverty and hardship in ever more decreasing resources. We see instead the possibility for a new era of economic growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base...We have the power to reconcile human affairs with the natural laws and to thrive in the process."*

This ability to thrive is what Gullah/Geechee people have sought for many years given what was at their disposal and what they saw that they could maintain and sustain. They thought that in many ways there would be support for this when the United States first established a national policy for environmental sustainability in 1969 with the passage of the [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\)](#) whose purpose was to "foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations." However, many that even work within the town councils and state general assemblies which create local laws in regard to land and water use are unaware of *NEPA* and its purpose it appears. On the federal level, *NEPA* is often treated as a checklist requirement for documents, but on the ground, the generations of people do not see their general welfare being at the heart of those in the policy offices that check off said list.

Interestingly enough, the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) has been working within the framework of the *United Nations'* definition of sustainability without knowing of this definition until the writing of this report. The definition of sustainability within the *United Nations* has three dimensions or pillars which are referred to as the "**Three Es of sustainability.**" These are:

- **environmental protection**
- **economic development**
- **social equity**

**“De Land da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability”** workshop focused on each of these topics without any of them being posed as items of discussion or being placed on an agenda. Each was a natural outgrowth of the experiences of each of the participants as was reflected in the comments that began the day. Queen Quet outlined the need for the future generations that live on the land to take have knowledge of the environment, value of their cultural traditions and the connection between the two in order for them to be effective stewards in the future. To this Ranger Mitch Helms stated:

*“Creating stewards is how we create sustainability for the future.”*

All agreed that with a “working definition,” they could now proceed with bringing in the “catch” that the [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#) had cast the net to draw in via this interactive dialogue.

### **Pronouncements of the Pillars of Sustainability**

Rick Devoe’s closing remarks were: *“Queen, I was struck by what you said at the beginning-‘Words are life so what are you speaking into existence?’ We may be speaking it, people may be hearing it, but they may not be listening. How do we get the word out there so that they will actually be listening instead of just hearing it?”*

*Working waterfronts are a major issue. We want to maintain culture and history. There is nothing wrong with that. It is what makes South Carolina what it is and the southeast what it is. Diversity is how you survive. If you go into one thing, you can fail. “*

These words seem to resound in the spirits of the Gullah/Geechees due to the fact that just like with the term “sustainability,” they are the living embodiment of “diversity” given their ancestral heritage and the diversity of cultural groups that came together to form their language, heritage, and traditions. However, the term “diversity” was not elaborated on during this discussion because it could take on an even wider range of definitions than “sustainability.” In fact, the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)* whose motto is “Building Peace in the Minds of Men and Women,” adopted the [“Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity”](#) in which **Article 1 is “Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity**

*Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.”*

Gullah/Geechee ideology is based on a cosmogram representing a cycle of life-birth, life, death, and the afterlife which thereby encompasses the past, present, and future generations. Thus, Gullah/Geechees begin to teach their children from birth a myriad of things so that they are aware of how these things link together and can all be a part of sustaining themselves in the future. They also encouraging taking care of oneself and what you have in order to leave something for the future generations when you pass on. In the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#), “*WEBE cuz hunnuh be. Hunnuh da me!*” So, in effect, all of us exist because I realize that you are me and I am because my ancestors were.

Queen Quet’s statement at the beginning to which Mr. DeVoe was referring also included: “*In Gullah/Geechee culture, we believe that you speak things into existence. So, if you are not speaking of me, then in your world, I do not exist.*”

Social equity cannot exist if an entire cultural group is left out of discussions that will effect the environment in which their cultural community is located. Dr. Annette Watson stated: “*As a geographer, I believe in place based education. The conversations today have been incredible because we went to some important places for Gullah/Geechee subsistence. We have identified that there is a problem with the discourse of the economy and we need to refine the discourse... Capitalism is a type of economy, but not the only one. Subsistence is an economy that we also need to discuss as a broader society and fold into all our political decisions about the economy. We can map landscapes and show Gullah/Geechee economies on maps as well as begin to talk differently.*”

Frank Peterman followed this with stating that: “*The conflict between communities that have at their base the protection of the group is different than what is required for capitalism. The conflict is in the support of the moral impairments of capitalism. We need to make capitalism more sensitive to the needs of the community. We need to reclaim the term sustainability and when someone co-opts it, we need to take them to task on their use and ask them what do they mean by it. Something you really believe in, you defend it. You don’t run from it! There are great opportunities with cooperation. The idea that competition is best has not been proven. Man has gained more through cooperation than competition. This community is subject to the mega pressures of the external community. I am not comfortable with what the response [to the challenge] maybe.*”



Dr. Dionne Hoskins added to the discussion by saying, *“in the importance of partnerships there is an intuitive community (natural stakeholder group). There are people that are going to be impacted by what sustainability is even if they do not have a homogenous view. Sustainable is what you can continue to do over time. There has to be an acquisition model that has to be sustainable.*

*In 1952 RJ Reynolds moved everyone to Hogg Hammock on Sapelo Island [GA] because he owned the history. We do not have the same dictatorial view of services and what we need to do. It is not longer that value is only assessed in terms of money and people with money get to make all the decisions. Historical, heritage, ecology, cultural value are all brought into this to determine if a practice is sustainable. They all do not have equal value, but they all have value. What is this thing that we are sharing? What do you want? How does everyone get what they need and most get what they want?”*

Everyone getting what they need and most getting what they want seems to be the essence of the “social equity” encompassed in the *United Nations* pillars of sustainability. However, although this “think tank” was willing to broach the subject, social equity within the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) is a discussion that is often avoided since it brings about conflicts based on economic class structure and ideals and ideologies that many reduce to discussions of race. Dr. Hargrove addressed this rejection of the discussion of social equity issues in the region by simply pointing out that *“Whiteness is a default norm. Irreconcilable epistemology-not place through experience, but a space because I bought it. It is ‘I think therefore I am vs I am because we are’.”*

This built upon Dr. Hollis France’s statement: *“As a political scientist that studies political economy, when I think of sustainability, I think of community. I think of passing on knowledge and livelihoods, harnessing that, and shared reciprocity. Collaboration and cooperation are about ‘power with’ as oppose to ‘power over.’ A power over framework is about competition and having to one up. Reframe the ideas of what power means. Within that power over, you have to demonize that which does not fit in.”*

This “power over” method of thinking results in what was presented in a closing statement by Audrey Peterman:

*“Most prescribed medicine in America is for depression. Americans produced more than 40% of the world’s waste. When I come here, I feel a return to sanity. ‘It is the WE as opposed to the I.’ Retreats for the leaders and decision makers need to be here.”*

However, as the Minister of Information, Elder Carlie Towne stated:

*“Sustainability is a long term maintenance of responsibility which has an economic, environmental and social dynamic. You cannot have environmental rights without human rights. We are sitting here saying ‘Mother Earth, we sorry. WE are not going to let anyone else do damage to you.’ We can’t bring them here. They wouldn’t be as productive as we are. They haven’t been for years! WE need to educate our young people so that in the future they will know what to do. ‘Mother of us all, we have been witness to the rape of the world. How can we stand aside and watch the rape of the world’.”* [verse from Tracy Chapman’s song, [“Rape of the World”](#)]

Elder Lesa Wineglass-Small followed this by stating:

*“As Gullah/Geechee people, we have to always tell our stories. Involve youth in photo journalism and film making. Make sure that our children have access.”*

Queen Quet pointed out that “access” was a key term within the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) since the heart of the reason for a “sustainability plan” for the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) stems in many ways from the lack of access that we currently face, and that we do not want continued into the future-lack of access to water for fishing, shrimping, crabbing, oyster picking, clamming, and burials at sacred grounds along the waterways as well as for sacred ceremonies and healing; lack of access to economic empowerment; lack of access to educational resources and funding for traditional educational opportunities; lack of access into the places where policies are being made and plans for this coastline are being discussed. The access issue takes many forms in regard to this traditional group’s living patterns versus that of mainland America.

The lack of access brought up many issues of economic disenfranchisement in juxtaposition to economic empowerment. Economic contradiction was eloquently outlined at the inception of the workshop and summarized by Representative Glenda Simmons-Jenkins not only while on St. Helena Island, but recapped at the conclusion of the workshop. She stated that the current political discussion of the larger society is in regard to people being “dependent.” Yet, the laws that are working against Gullah/Geechees that previously went out and got their own food and also built their own homes and took care of their own health throughout the generations is undermined by

the laws that now make it illegal or not cost effective for them to continue their own self-sustaining and independent practices. These laws were set in place beginning with laws during the Jim Crow Era and there have been more laws brought in as mechanisms to displace Gullah/Geechees from their homeland. This has created a system of dependency. If the Gullah/Geechees were supported in having indigenous fishing rights, that would go a long way in reversing this trend and would also allow them to teach future generations to be self-determined and self-sustaining as were the generations prior to the current one. She stated:

*“Indigenous and tribal people have to understand the context in which we live. St. Helena has maintained a cultural context while surrounded by another. Most communities are not afforded that benefit. The majority culture looks at things in this strict dichotomy-either or. You are an individual or dependent. The situation and circumstances determine how you operate. You have to be flexible and not rigid. We operate in a system of interdependence the opposite of which is co-dependence which is parasitic and draining. ‘Environmental degradation perpetuates dependency.’ In addition to bringing people here, I am looking forward to reclaiming that in the space where we live so that we can be an example to others of what is possible. We can show others options. We can maintain, in the midst of this, our identity and not become absorbed in the majority culture.”*

To this, Representative Zack Lyde stated:

*“I remember being ostracized for thinking about sustainability. I see birds dropping out the sky without broken wings. Something is wrong. You have done something wrong with it. Sustainability is in the first part of the Bible and lays out a path of how to live in harmony with the environment...Genesis 2-take care of my creation. Sustainability does not have greed in it. Greed develops depression. Poverty develops depression. The Gullah/Geechee way of life cures depression because it brings about stability by its very nature. Self-preservation, self-determination is absolutely critical if you are going to have sustainability as a part of your life.”*

Dr. Melissa Hargrove felt that people do need to come to the environment to feel it, experience and understand it, especially from the perspective of the Gullah/Geechees. Her comments seemed to do what most Gullah/Geechee gatherings do in a literally and figurative sense (since their cosmology and existence is centered on circles) because it came back to the closing words that Ranger Helms had spoken into the space when he brought up a Gullah/Geechee proverb. He said, *“Queen, in education of the future stewards, the children of the Gullah-”****De wata da bring we, de wata gwine tek we bak****”* needs to be taught not just to them, but to all children.”

Dr. Hargrove's concluding statement: ***"If you are part of the environment, you are at peace with the environment."*** in the ears of the Gullah/Geechees was a translation of the title for the day, ***"De Land da We."*** So, we knew that we had now reached the shore together "in the same boat." So, we could go forth and feed others from what we had harvested together.



## Conclusion

All participants ended the day not only exchanging cards, but embracing one another and embracing the process that had taken place. There were discussions of ways to take the various components discussed and work with the [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#), the [Gullah/Geechee Angel Network](#), and leaders of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) to complete the sustainability plan, formulate other educational programs and to assist with subsistence fishing legislation in order to insure that the Gullah/Geechee culture is sustained and so that we do have working waterfront areas that can economically support those that reside in the region.

Funding resources will be sought by various members of the group in order to assist the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) with additional research, workshops, youth programs, and activities of involvement in major environmental discussions that are taking place including those dealing with climate change, restoration and protection of the waterways, and involving youths in S.T.E.M. fields so that they will be effective stewards of our cultural and natural resources in the future.

Several participants showed interest in becoming members of [“The Coastal Society”](#) and in attending the [TCS Conference](#) in Miami in June. The [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#) looks forward to Queen Quet being able to present the outcome of **“De Island da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability”** to the [TCS](#) family in person. We pray that like Ranger Mitch Helms, TCS and other organizations interested in the coast will receive the same insight that he captured and sent in an email entitled “A Reflection on the De Land da We: Gullah/Geechee Coastal Sustainability: An Interactive Workshop Celebrating the Living Environment of the Sea Islands:

*“My participation in the Gullah/Geechee Coastal Sustainability workshop was truly an inspiring, if not spiritual, experience; it gave me pause to consider important ideas pertaining to the nature and existence of the Gullah/Geechees as a People. Not only regarding the future and survival of this precious culture, but on their past as well. Queen Quet opened the roundtable with a story which contained an analogy that, for me at least, became the theme for the entire day: ‘We have to see beyond the fog. Though it temporarily blocks our vision, we must have faith and believe that there is something good on the other side; we must keep going.’ This steadfast attitude held by the Queen, the Elders, and others in the Gullah/Geechee Nation gave me hope about the future and direction of the Gullah/Geechees, despite many obstacles and challenges that threaten access to the waterways and the Gullah way of life.*

*Spending the day with Queen Quet and the many distinguished scholars and guests at the event engaging us with lofty ideas prompted a revelation which, as a Naturalist and a student of nature, opened my eyes to a marvelous connection between the Gullah/Geechees and an event that happened long ago in Earth's history.*

*Around 300 million years ago, two super landmasses collided to form a single large continent called Pangaea. In the process, the collision of the oceanic plate of the southern landmass (now known as Africa) with the oceanic plate of the northern landmass (now known as the Southeastern part of the United States) created the Appalachian Mountains. Then, between 225-190 million years ago, the major land mass of Pangaea started to split apart along the old collision zones, creating rift basins. The shoreline of the rift known as the Georgia Bight runs from present day Cape Hatteras, North Carolina to Cape Canaveral, Florida and is over 740 miles long. The collision 300 million years ago caused a down warping of the underlying crust in the center of the Georgia Bight in the area now known as the "Low country" of South Carolina, and is the very reason our coast has evolved the way it has. (Hayes and Michel, 2008).*

*Given the connection between the waterways of the SC Low country and the historic dependence of the Gullah/Geechee on access to the water, it seems almost divinely ordained that the exact geographic location on the planet where the collision 300 million years ago of what is now Africa and the Southeastern United States also happens to be the heart of the Gullah/Geechee Nation! Was 'Mother Africa' 'seeing beyond the fog' so many years ago into the very distant future, preparing the landscape for her children that were to be stolen from her? To be sure, this is a stretch of the imagination, but true or not, we must do our best to maintain the sustainability of the living environment of the richly diverse Sea Islands for all of her children." (Mitch Helms, Interpretive Ranger, Hunting Island State Park)*

***"De wata da bring we an de wata gwine tek we bak."***

The day on the waters of the [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#) took us back to the beginning and reminded us to “*But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.* (Job 12:7-10 NIV Bible)

“Without breath, there is no life. So, when we speak, we breathe. We give life to that which we say.” ([Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation](#))

***“May what we have said bring more life this way  
For life is what we celebrated on the Sea Islands one Saturday.  
A group was directed by the words of the Almighty  
To take a trip and hear from those that live on the sea.  
From within their souls came each word that they had to say  
Which brought forth new life throughout the day.  
When it all was ending, I said, “Tenki tenki  
fa dees ya cumin fa yeddi de Gullah/Geechee fa da land da we!”***

- [Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation](#)  
Founder, [Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition](#)  
Advisory Board Member, [Gullah/Geechee Angel Network](#)  
Founding Member and Secretary, [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#)



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The Coastal Society [www.thecoastalsociety.org](http://www.thecoastalsociety.org)

Taylor & Francis [www.taylorandfrancisgroup.com](http://www.taylorandfrancisgroup.com)

Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition [www.gullahgeechee.net](http://www.gullahgeechee.net)

The Gullah/Geechee Angel Network [www.gullahgeecheeangelnetwork.com](http://www.gullahgeecheeangelnetwork.com)

The South Carolina Coastal Conservation League [www.coastalconservationleague.org](http://www.coastalconservationleague.org)

The College of Charleston's Riley Center for Livable Communities [www.riley.cofc.edu](http://www.riley.cofc.edu)

The Environmental Defense Fund [www.edf.org](http://www.edf.org)

Hunting Island Nature Center [http://www.huntingisland.com/nature\\_center.htm](http://www.huntingisland.com/nature_center.htm)

**Photographs from De Land da We: Gullah/Geechee Sustainability Workshop:**

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.2589127973636.2111377.1417694558&type=3&l=63c5839115>

**Suggested Educational Resource Links:**

Gullah/Geechee history books: [www.gullahgeechee.biz](http://www.gullahgeechee.biz)

*Legacy on the Land*: <http://earthwiseproductionsinc.com/buy-legacy-on-the-land>

Environmental Defense Fund Ocean's Program Blog about the Gullah/Geechee Nation:

<http://solutions.edf.org/2010/12/07/a-voice-for-african-american-fishermen-in-the-southeast/>

<http://blogs.edf.org/edfish/2010/01/28/queen-quet-chieftess-of-the-gullahgeechee-nation-and-edf-host-listening-session-for-gullahgeechee-fishermen/>

<http://blogs.edf.org/edfish/2010/03/11/listening-sessions-with-gullahgeechee-fishermen-continue/>

<http://blogs.edf.org/edfish/2010/04/23/last-stop-sea-breeze-nc/>

Coastal Heritage Magazine: *The Living Soul of Gullah* by Sea Grant Consortium:

[http://www.scseagrant.org/pdf\\_files/ch\\_spring\\_2000.pdf](http://www.scseagrant.org/pdf_files/ch_spring_2000.pdf)

Coastal Heritage Magazine: *Gullah's Radiant Light* by Sea Grant Consortium:

[http://www.scseagrant.org/pdf\\_files/ch\\_winter\\_04.pdf](http://www.scseagrant.org/pdf_files/ch_winter_04.pdf)